NOVA SCOTIA
Environment and Labour
Environmental and Natural Areas Management Division
Protected Areas Branch

Guide to Campsite Leases and Licences in Protected Wilderness Areas

July 2003

This document describes the administration of campsite leases and licences as recognized interests in provincially protected wilderness areas. The Wilderness Areas Protection Act allows these interests to continue, through a licence issued by the Department of Environment and Labour (DEL). This licensing process is jointly administered with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), with DNR playing a primary role in licence processing and renewal.

Background

Campsite Leases

Campsite leases are legally established campsites, with a permanent camp structure, located on small parcels of provincially owned lands. Some sites have been used for decades and are part of the outdoor recreation heritage of Nova Scotia.

Until 1989, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) issued leases for new sites on Crown lands, under the Crown Lands Act. The leases allowed the lease holder to maintain a simple building for use as a hunting or fishing camp, or similar recreational purposes, for personal use.

Approximately 100 campsites are located within provincially protected Wilderness Areas. These sites have a valid, pre-existing campsite lease interest, which predates designation of the Wilderness Area and is recognized by the Wilderness Areas Protection Act. Use of the sites must be conducted in a way that ensures minimal environmental impact on the Wilderness Area.

Wilderness Areas

Approximately 5% of the province is protected in designated Wilderness Areas.

Wilderness Areas are significant natural areas, designated under Nova Scotia's Wilderness Areas Protection Act.

The existing areas were designated in 1998, following an extensive, province-wide, planning and consultation process.

Wilderness Areas protect examples of different landscapes and outstanding natural features, while providing opportunities for enjoying wilderness recreation, sportfishing, and traditional patterns of hunting and trapping.

Principles

Management of campsite leases and licenses is governed by the provisions of the Wilderness Areas Protection Act.

Existing Interests

Campsite leases and licences are recognized as part of the province's wilderness heritage and are integral to Wilderness Areas.

They may continue until their lawful termination or cancellation and may be renewed according to legislation and policies.

Stewardship

Campsite lease and licence holders are expected to act as good environmental stewards in ensuring that Wilderness Areas retain the natural and recreational values that Nova Scotians hold dear.

Lease and licence holders are expected to take responsibility for sensitive use of campsites and surrounding lands and to encourage campsite guests and other users to use the area appropriately.

Minimal Environmental Impact

Campsite lease and licence holders must meet certain standards at their campsites to minimize impacts on the environment.

Holders must comply with the provisions of the Wilderness Areas Protection Act and other legislation, as well as specific terms and conditions included in campsite licences. Most standards are the same or similar to those previously established by the Department of Natural Resources for campsite leases on Crown lands.

The province encourages and works with lease and licence holders to ensure that continued use of the sites is consistent with the long-term protection of the natural environment.

Standards

Lease Replacement

As directed by the act, when campsite leases issued by the Department of Natural Resources for sites now within a Wilderness Area are approved for renewal or assignment, they will be replaced by campsite licences issued by the Department of Environment and Labour.

Administration

Campsite leases and licences are mostly administered according to the campsite lease policy for Crown lands adopted by DNR, and any updates. In some circumstances, administration varies slightly to ensure consistency with the Wilderness Areas Protection Act and the terms and conditions of campsite licences.

In accordance with the act and/or DNR's campsite lease policy for Crown lands:

- No new applications for leases or licenses will be considered.
- Licenses are issued to Nova Scotia residents only.
- If the lease or license holder fails to pay rent or fees following notice, or if a campsite becomes uninhabitable or abandoned, the lease or license is cancelled.
- An individual may be named on only one campsite lease or license
- Refunds are not given for fees paid for cancelled licenses.

Fees

Annual campsite licence fees are the same as annual rental fees charged by DNR for campsite leases.

Administration fees for processing are the same as administration fees charged by DNR for processing.

Assignment fees are the same as those charged by DNR for campsite leases on Crown lands.

Campsite Purpose

Consistent with the original intent of DNR's campsite leases, campsite licences are to be used as seasonal camps for hunting, fishing, or other wilderness recreational purposes, for personal use by the lease or licence holder(s).

Term and Renewal

The term of a campsite license is 10 years. When a licence is re-issued to allow assignment (transfer) of an interest partway through the term, the term will remain the same.

Renewal upon expiry of 10-year campsite licences requires approval from the Minister of Environment and Labour.

To ensure that DEL has a direct relationship with users of campsites, organizations may not hold campsite licences. Upon renewal, leases held in the name of organizations will be converted to campsite licences held in the names of no more than 10 individuals.

Environmental Protection

Management standards for campsite leases and licences minimize environmental degradation of the Wilderness Area, while allowing the campsite lease or licence holder to use their site for its legitimate purpose.

Fire Risk: To protect the forest from accidental fire, campsite lease or license holders must comply with "woods closures" announced by the Minister of Natural Resources.

Permission to enter the campsite during woods closures must be obtained from the DNR office.

Building Standards: Camps must meet the DNR *Campsite Building and Maintenance Standards.* The standards for floor area and construction materials will be waived for existing structures belonging to lessees and licensees who held valid leases dated before March 31, 1989. All latrines must be 15 metres (50 feet) or more from watercourses.

Repairs: Rebuilding, moving a building, expanding a building, replacing walls, or digging for any purpose, requires **written** permission from DEL.

Landscaping: Landscaping is not permitted because of the risk of introducing or encouraging non-native plant species.

Fuelwood Supply: Dead or fallen trees may be cut within the lease/ license boundaries. Fallen wood outside the boundaries may be collected. Cutting any live trees or standing dead trees outside the licensed boundaries is not permitted because of the wildlife habitat value.

Camp users are encouraged to make efficient use of wood to reduce the impact on important smoke-sensitive species.

Access

Vehicle access is not automatically provided through a campsite licence. All campsite licensees wishing to reach the site by vehicle must apply for a vehicle access licence, as directed by the act and any applicable policies or guidelines.

Vehicle licencing may be considered where there is no reasonable alternative to vehicle use, and where continued use will have a minimal environmental impact.

Vehicle licences show an authorized access route and outline specific conditions and responsibilities for vehicle use.

Assignment

Assignment (or transfer) of campsite leases and licences within Wilderness Areas requires prior, written permission of DEL.

Assignment requests are considered between individuals on a one-to-one basis. The number of people who hold a single lease or licence may not increase as a result of an assignment (or bequest).

Campsite leases and licences may not be sold. However, the building structures are considered to be owned by the site holder and may be transferred for consideration.

Individuals planning to purchase a structure on a campsite lease or licence are strongly encouraged to have written permission from DEL to become the licence holder, before paying for the structure.

Campsite leases or licences that are cancelled or have been expired for six months or more, and for which a written request to renew has not been received by the province, are not considered for assignment.

Renewal Procedures for Campsite Holders

Renewal

Individuals

Advise the Department of Natural Resources, Land Administration Division, in writing, that you wish to renew. If you are not previously named on the lease, review the standards on "assignment" to determine if you will be eligible. You will be contacted by government staff in due course.

Organizations

Advise the Department of Natural Resources, Land Administration Division, in writing, that you wish to renew and provide a list of the individuals who will be named on the licence in place of the organization's name. No more than 10 individuals may be named on one licence. You will be contacted by government staff in due course.

Processing renewals and assignments

When your written request for renewal or assignment is received by the Land Administration Division, it is forwarded to the appropriate District Office of DNR for a field report. Staff visit the site and provide a report, which is then forwarded to DEL.

After receiving the field report, DEL reviews the request and field report to ensure that it complies with guidelines and the Wilderness Areas Protection Act and makes a decision.

DEL will inform you of the approval decision by mail. The letter will advise you if you need to do anything else before your request will be processed.

If the request is approved, and conditions are met, DNR will contact you to arrange for signing your new licence.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I get permission to make a major improvement or change to a structure or land within my campsite lease (digging, reconstruction)?

Review the standards on environmental protection. If necessary, obtain written permission from the appropriate regional office of the Protected Areas Branch of the Department of Environment and Labour.

How do I transfer my campsite lease or licence to another person (assignment)?

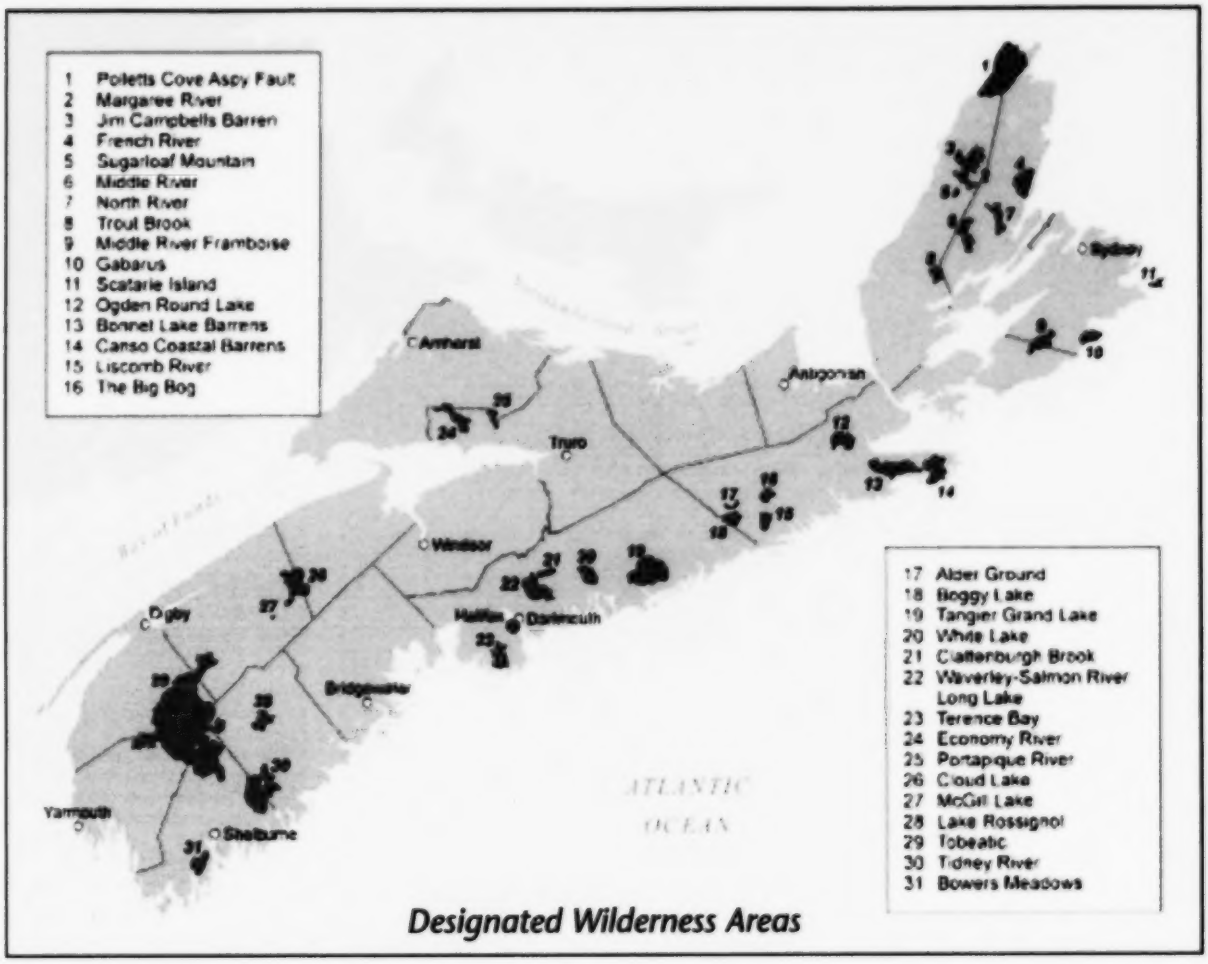
Review the standards on assignment. If you believe your request will be considered, advise the Department of Natural Resources, Land Administration Division, in writing, that you wish to assign your interest.

Identify the person to whom you wish to assign your interest as well as their home address and phone number. You will be contacted by government staff in due course.

If assignment is tentatively approved, the new assignee will be asked to obtain the written permission of all lease or licence holders currently named on the lease, before the interest can be assigned. If the original lease or license holder is deceased, a copy of the will or written permission of the heir(s), executors or administrators will be required.

How do I get permission to use a vehicle to reach my site?

Contact the appropriate regional office of the Protected Areas Branch of the Department of Environment and Labour to discuss vehicle licensing.



Designated Wilderness Areas

Contact Information

DNR – Land Administration Division

P.O. Box 698, Founders Square, 1701 Hollis Street
Halifax, NS B3J 2T9
Tel: 424-4267

DEL – Protected Areas Branch

Western Regional Office
60 Logan Road, Bridgewater, NS B4V 3J8
Tel: 543-4685

Central Regional Office
5151 Terminal Road, Halifax, NS B3J 2T8
Tel: 424-2117
www.gov.ns.ca/enla/pareas
e-mail: protectedareas@gov.ns.ca

Eastern Regional Office
295 Charlotte Street, Sydney, NS B1P 6H7
Tel: 563-2100

For information on Nova Scotia's Wilderness Areas, visit your regional DEL or local DNR office, and pick up a copy of the following publications:

- ***Keep It Wild*** – a guide for low impact recreation in Nova Scotia's Wilderness Areas
- ***Protecting Wilderness*** – a summary of Nova Scotia's Wilderness Areas Protection Act

Wilderness Areas are mapped in the Fifth Edition of *The Nova Scotia Atlas (2001)* – available at bookstores.

Keep It Wild

Nova Scotia's Protected Areas